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26TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

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March 18, 2020

The Honorable Admiral Brett Giroir
Assistant Secretary for Health
US Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independent Ave SW
Washington DC 20201

Dear Admiral Giroir-

I write today to express significant concerns regarding the ability of public health officials in my district to obtain a sustainable supply of materials necessary to test individuals suspected of having Coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

New York State is now the most affected state in the nation by COVID-19, representing more than one-quarter of all cases of COVID-19 in the United States. Multiple cases have now been confirmed in my district, which encompasses much of Erie and Niagara Counties in Western New York. Yesterday, we received reports that the Erie County Department of Health was at risk of having to stop testing for COVID-19 altogether due to a lack of appropriate swabs and viral mediums necessary to complete testing, leaving county health officials scrambling to try and obtain additional supplies. When attempting to get more testing materials directly from the manufacturers, they were told they could not; orders made by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) were dominating the supply chain.

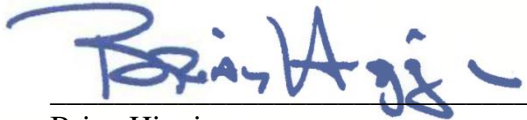
If requisition orders for COVID-19 testing supplies from the CDC or other agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) are crowding out the ability of local public health departments to obtain their own supply, that represents a serious threat to the health and safety of people in my district and around the country. HHS must immediately re-evaluate the process by which it is obtaining COVID-19 testing materials and distributing them to state and local public health officials, and guarantee the ability of those officials to receive a steady supply of testing materials in a timely fashion.

This Administration should be acting in a proactive way to help communities plan to address this crisis responsibly. It is horrifying that at this time we must instead beg for your attention. In my estimation, based on current rates of transmission, Erie County and Niagara County should have resources, at minimum to provide for at least 10,000 tests, more than 200 a day, for the next 45

days. The paucity of certainty in this situation leaves our community in a state of desperation. Your immediate attention and resolution to this matter is respectfully requested to alleviate unnecessary suffering and help mitigate this problem.

Our nation is already significantly behind the curve in our response to this public health crisis, and we cannot afford further delays in testing. I look forward to your resolving this matter promptly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brian Higgins", with a horizontal line underneath.

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress